

opposing factions within the party. The Republican nominating committee knew that factional hostilities within the Democratic Party would develop further rifts in the organization over those two seats. In order to facilitate this end, the Republicans offered to support the Regular Democratic candidates for office, and, in return, the Regulars agreed to stop the practice of challenging voter eligibility in the traditionally black Republican First and Fifth Wards. The end result was that Russell demonstrated his ability to manage the party, as evidenced by the large number of black voters who returned to the polls, enabling the election of Russell's candidates because he instructed black voters on which candidates to elect.<sup>9</sup>

The 1894 election in New Hanover County showed that when the Republican Party was well organized, it could defeat the Democrats. In New Hanover, Republican candidates were elected to all positions for which the party put forward candidates. Leader Russell claimed that the victory was "the most extraordinary political achievement of the period." Three positions—clerk of Superior Court, register of deeds and one house member—were uncontested by the Republicans and, by default, were claimed by Democrats.<sup>10</sup>

#### **1894 Statewide Election Results North Carolina General Assembly**

	House	Senate
Populists	36	24
Republicans	38	18
Democrats	46	8

<sup>9</sup> McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 396-399.

<sup>10</sup> Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 37-38; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 411. Statistics for the 1894 elections results table excerpted from Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 37-38.

Statewide, the combination of the Republicans and Populists proved Democratic defeat was possible. The *Wilmington Messenger's* editor, T. B. Kingsbury, published a series of articles explaining the 1894 defeat. Kingsbury editorialized that the next election should be based on white government. He attributed the defeat to internal dissent, which had led many Democrats to stay away from the polls, and acknowledged that Fusionists were well organized as they were able to function in secrecy.<sup>11</sup> The Democratic majority in the legislature was erased and upper-level positions for the senate, state supreme court, and other statewide seats were lost. Furthermore, the new Fusionist legislature immediately began to fulfill their election campaign promises to implement changes to the system of government established by the Democrats during their tenure of control since Reconstruction.<sup>12</sup>

Across the state, Democrats challenged the election results. In New Hanover County, Thomas Strange, Democratic Reformer candidate for the lower house, challenged the election of

<sup>11</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, November 7, 9, 1894.

<sup>12</sup> Twenty-three counties returned Republican majorities with 33 boasting a Populist majority and 34 went Democrat. Four counties featured a Republican-Populist fusion and 2 featured Republican-Democrat fusion. Six traditionally "black" counties, those with a black voting majority, returned a majority of Democratic votes and 2 other "black" counties fused with the Democrats for victory. Therefore, historian Helen Edmonds surmises that black voters were not pivotal in determining the outcome of the 1894 fusion election. Once the fusion legislature began, their first order of business was to send Populist Marion Butler to the Senate for a full term and to send Republican Jeter Pritchard to fill the remainder of the term left by the death of Zebulon Vance. Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 37-41; Gov. Russell to Thomas Settle, Thomas Settle Papers, Southern Historical Collection, UNC-CH, as quoted from McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 411; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 398-401, 404-405.